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BLACKFOOT MYTHOLOGY.¹

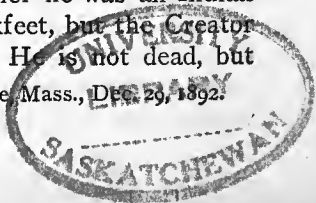
THE Blackfoot Indian Confederacy comprises the Piegan, Blood, and Blackfoot tribes. Each tribe is located on its own reservation, and the three reservations are within the provisional district of Alberta. The separation of the tribes, the rapid settlement of the country by the white people, the death of many of the old chiefs, and the depressed spirits of the people have seriously impaired the purity of the folk-lore of the natives. The following fragments were gathered from the lips of the Blood Indians, as I sat in their lodges with note-book in hand. The younger members of the tribe could not be relied upon to relate these myths accurately. Those I have given have been repeatedly verified by the aged members of the tribe.

CREATION MYTH.

Napioa, the *Old Man*, floated upon a log in the waters, and had with him four animals: Mameo, the fish; Matcekûpis, the frog; Maniskeo, the lizard; and Spopeo, the turtle. He sent them down into the waters in the order named, to see what they could find. The first three descended, but never returned; the turtle, however, arose with his mouth full of mud. Napioa took the mud from the mouth of the turtle, rolled it around in the hollow of his hand, and in this manner made the earth, which fell into the waters, and afterward grew to its present size.

There was only one person named Napioa. He lived in the world when the people who dwelt with him had two heads. He did not make these people, although he made the world, and how they came upon the earth no one knows. The Bloods do not know where Napioa came from. They do not know whether he was an Indian or not. He was not the ancestor of the Blackfeet, but the Creator of the Indian race. He was double-jointed. He is not dead, but

¹ Paper read at the Third Annual Meeting, Cambridge Mass., Dec. 29, 1892.



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is living in a great sea in the south. He did not make the white people, and the Indians do not know who made them.

After he made the earth, he first made a woman. Her mouth was slit vertically, and he was not satisfied, so he closed it, and recut it in the same shape as it has remained till to-day. Afterward he made several women, and then he made several men. The men lived together, but separate from the women, and they did not see the women for some time. When the men first saw the women they were astonished and somewhat afraid. Napioa told them to take one woman each, but they were afraid. He encouraged them, and then they each took a wife.

Napioa made the buffalo. They were quite tame. He gave bows and arrows to the Indians and told them to shoot the buffalo. They did so; and as the buffalo were tame, they killed a large number.

ORIGIN OF THE WIND.

The stories differ. Some say that it is caused by a very large deer which dwells in the mountains; others, that there are large cattle in the mountains, who roar loudly and thus cause the wind to blow; and again others, that it is caused by a large bird flapping its wings in the mountains. The prevailing form is the following:

Napioa at one time had with him the wolf as his companion. He also had with him an owl, which he employed to look for things for him when it was dark. As he was travelling around he saw a lodge in which were a man and a woman. In this lodge were two bags; one contained the winter and the other the summer. He told the owl to look in and see what there was inside the lodge, and when he looked he saw the two bags. Napioa said that he was going to place some months in each bag, and make the summer and winter of equal length. He went inside, and the woman had a long piece of ice. He failed to accomplish his purpose. He came out of the lodge determined to gain possession of the summer and winter bags. He told the prairie chicken to steal the bags, and it got hold of the summer bag and escaped. Being pursued by the man and woman, the prairie chicken hid in the long grass. The man and woman cut the long grass to get the bag. The chicken clung close to the earth, and had part of the extremity of its body taken off. In the struggle the bag burst, and a very strong wind sprang up.

Some time after this, Napioa, having burnt himself, was anxious for a wind to blow to cool himself. He went up to the top of a mountain and began "making medicine," and the wind soon began to blow. It blew so hard that he had to hold on to the bushes, but they were torn up by the roots. At last he caught hold of a birch tree and firmly clung to it, so that by the force of the wind and his weight marks were left upon the bark of the tree.

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THE BLOOD-CLOT BOY.

There lived, a long time ago, an old man and his wife, who had three daughters and one son-in-law. One day, as the mother was cooking some meat, she threw a clot of blood into the pot containing the meat. The pot began to boil, and then there issued from it a peculiar hissing noise. The old woman looked into the pot, and was surprised to see that the blood-clot had become transformed into a little boy. Quickly he grew, and in a few moments he sprang from the pot, a full-grown young man. The father and mother were delighted, but the son-in-law was angry and jealous. The name of the blood-clot boy was Kûtoyîs. The son-in-law was a lazy, bad-tempered young man, who made the old man hunt the buffalo, procure the wood, and carry the water. He had a lodge of his own, where he dwelt with his wife. When the old man brought in the meat he threw it down in his lodge; and no sooner had he placed it there than the son-in-law came and took whatever he needed, oftentimes leaving the old man and his family in want. The old man brought in wood and water for his family, and the son-in-law took what he wanted. Sometimes the old man and his family were compelled to suffer, because as he was old he could not work very hard, and all that he had was taken from him. The son-in-law would not hunt, but depended altogether upon the old man to support him. Kûtoyîs went out to hunt with his father, and he proved himself to be an expert hunter. He saw a fine fat buffalo cow, and he killed it. He procured abundance of meat for his father, and he carried it home for him. He would not allow the old man to do any work. He filled his lodge with meat. He then went out and got a large supply of wood and water. As Kûtoyîs and his father were walking together, they heard the son-in-law scolding. The old man was afraid. Kûtoyîs told his father not to be afraid. He told him to say to his son-in-law that he could not get any of the meat, wood, or water. If he threatened to kill him, he was to answer him in the same manner. The son-in-law came to the old man's lodge and began to remove the meat. The old man told him to leave it alone. He threatened to kill the old man, and the father-in-law angrily retorted that he would kill him. The son-in-law became very angry, and ran to his lodge for his bow and arrows. When he had procured them he returned, scolding and threatening; and as he reached the old man's lodge, Kûtoyîs, who had been hiding behind the lodge, sprang in front of the old man, and the two men fought. Kûtoyîs drew his bow and killed his brother-in-law dead. After his death the old man and his family had peace and abundance of food. The son-in-law had no distinguishing name. Kûtoyîs sought to drive out all the evil in the world, and to unite the people and make them happy.

The fathers and mothers in the camp told this story to their children to hush them to sleep.

NAPIOA.

Napioa is the Secondary Creator of the Indians. There are two kinds of stories told concerning him. One class reveals him in the character of a good man, and the other class as a bad man. He is not, however, a man, but a supernatural being, able to perform deeds which no human being could perform. The Indians do not know the manner of his birth, nor the place from whence he came. He is still living in a great sea away in the south. He made his home for a long time at the source of the Old Man's River, in Alberta, where may be seen the lake from which he drank, the stones which he threw along the ground when he was sporting, and the indentations in the ground showing where he lay. At the Red Deer River there is a high ridge, where there is a land-slide, down which Napioa slid as a toboggan slide.

One day, as he was travelling across the prairie, he saw a bird which threw its eyes upward, and said, "Tuhu!" As he came up to the place where the bird was, he said, "Let me see how you do that?" After being told to repeat this word and throw his head back, he felt quite elated. He was so much overjoyed that he threw his eyes up repeatedly. He was standing under a tree, and as he threw his eyes upward they were caught in the branches of the tree, and he lost his sight. He then went off alone. As he wandered on his journey he kept beckoning in different directions, so that if any one saw him he would receive help and find his people. A woman saw him throwing his arms about as if desiring some one to come to him, and at once she went and asked him what he wanted. He said, "Take me to the place where the people are." She took him and led him along by means of a stick, the woman going in front and Napioa following. He was afraid that she might leave him, so he tied a bell to her dress, that he might follow her should she try to escape. Nothing eventful happened until they crossed a river, when he inquired, "Are there any buffalo to be seen?" The woman answered, "Yes, there are some at the river now." He told her to point his arrow toward the buffalo, that he might shoot one. She did so; but he missed the buffalo, and then he shouted that the arrow did not belong to him. Again he commanded her to point an arrow in the right direction; but the buffalo were not killed, and again he asserted that the arrow did not belong to him. After several attempts he shot a buffalo, and then called out, "That was my arrow." He bade the woman skin the animal, cut up the meat, and bring it to the camping ground. While she was doing this he said

that he would put up the lodge. He sought the lodge-poles; and as he brought them one by one, he failed to find those that he had already placed on the ground. He had quite a number of lodge-poles arranged here and there, but owing to his blindness he could not collect them. When the woman returned she asked him why he had so many poles, and none arranged in their proper places. "That you might choose the best ones," he replied. Thus was Napioa ever crafty, never allowing any one to say that there was anything wrong with him. The lodge being prepared, and supper ended, Napioa went to sleep. As he lay with his hair drawn over his eyes, the curiosity of the woman tempted her to lift the hair that she might see his face. As she slowly lifted his locks she gazed into the empty sockets from which his eyes had been torn, and suddenly seized with terror, she fled from the lodge and sped her way through the darkness. Napioa heard the bell, and springing from his grassy bed, pursued her, guided by the ringing of the bell. She ran in different directions; but he was fast gaining upon her when she tore the bell from her dress, and as she threw it one way she ran in another direction, and thus escaped from the wiles of Napioa.

The dwellers in the Western lodges have many legends relating to places of historical interest in the country, and these throw a flood of light on the religious ideas, migrations, social and domestic customs, political life, and other matters of interest connected with the tribes comprising the Blackfoot Confederacy. Some of the legends are local, and when told by the aged men as they sit around their camp-fires, vary somewhat in detail according to the intellectual ability, inventiveness, and strength of memory of the narrator. I have listened to some of these legends as told over and over again for the past nine years, and I find that the young men are not able to relate them as accurately as the aged; besides, as the country is becoming settled with white people, they are less disposed to tell to others their native religious ideas, lest they are laughed at because of not believing the same things as their superior brethren of the white race. As the children grow up they are forgetting these things, and the years are not far distant when the folk-lore of the Blackfeet will be greatly changed, and many of their traditions forgotten.

THE LEGEND OF SHEEP CREEK.

Napioa, the Old Man, the Secondary Creator of the Blackfeet, was travelling one day with the Kit-Fox, near Sheep Creek, which is located about twenty-five miles south of Calgary, in the Provisional District of Alberta. As they travelled together they saw a large rock, and Napioa felt constrained to make an offering of his robe

to it. He presented the robe, and, with the Kit-Fox as his companion, departed. He had not proceeded far upon the way, when perceiving that it was going to rain, he told his companion to return and ask the rock to give him back his robe, as he was afraid of being drenched with the rain. The rock refused to give the robe to the Kit-Fox, and then Napioa, becoming angry, said: "That old rock has been there for a long time and never had a robe. It has always been poor. I will go back myself and take away my robe."

He returned and took the robe by force, and then the rock became very angry, and followed them, determined to punish them. Napioa fled south toward High River, and the Kit-Fox, anxious for his own safety, hid in a hole in the ground. Napioa saw an old buffalo bull, and he called to him for help; but when the buffalo came to his rescue the rock ran over him and crushed him to death. Then two bears came to help Napioa, and they two were killed by the rock. Two small birds with very large, strong bills came to help him, and they attacked the rock, breaking off pieces from it as they suddenly pounced upon it and then flew upward. In a short time they killed the rock, and Napioa was saved. The Indians then named the stream "Oqkotoqseetûqta" (the Rock Creek, or Stony Creek), but it is called by the white people at the present day "Sheep Creek."

LEGEND OF TONGUE CREEK.

Tongue Creek is situated between Sheep Creek and High River, about nine miles south of Sheep Creek. In the distant past, Napioa was travelling in the vicinity of Tongue Creek, when he espied a band of elk sporting themselves on its banks. They came to a place where the bank was steep, and they all leaped down, seeking a sandy resting-place in the bed of the stream. Napioa reached the creek, and lighting a piece of wood, he threw the firebrand over the bank. The elk heard him, and asked him what he wanted. "Oh," said he, "I was laughing when you spoke to me, and I could not answer: but that is a very nice spot down there, and I want to go down, for there is an abundance of beautiful clean sand." When the elk saw the firebrand they became frightened, and rushing headlong over each other, broke their necks. A single young elk escaped; but Napioa said, "Never mind, there are many more elk in the country; that one can go." Napioa pitched his lodge and erected a pole with a flag upon it. He skinned the elk, filled his lodge with the meat, and made preparations to camp there and have a feast. While thus engaged, a coyote entered his lodge and asked him for something to eat, but he would not give any. He noticed that the coyote had on a necklace of shells, and said, "If you will give me that necklace, I will give you something to eat." The coyote replied, "I can't do that,

for this is my medicine [amulet], and it is very strong." "Well, I will run a race with you, and if you beat me I will give you some of the meat." But the coyote refused, and as he did so he held out a bandaged foot, and the two went on together, the coyote protesting that his foot was sore, and he could not run. He managed to get Napioa a long distance from the lodge, and then quickly unloosing the bandage from his foot, he ran back to the lodge. Napioa followed a long distance behind, shouting, "Save me some of the meat!" When the coyote reached the lodge he called aloud for his fellow-coyotes, who speedily came and devoured all the meat. Napioa had placed the tongues on the top of the pole, but a mouse ran up the pole and ate them all. When Napioa found that all the meat was gone, he said, "Then I shall have the tongues, for the coyote could not get them." But as he took down the remaining portions he threw them away, saying, "They are bad food." The Indians call this creek "Matsinawûstam" (Tongue Flag), but the white people call it "Tongue Creek."

LEGEND OF RED COULEE.

There lies in a "coulee" near the Marias River, on the road that leads from Macleod to Benton, a large "medicine stone," venerated by the Indians belonging to the Blackfoot Confederacy. The "coulee" is named by the Indians the "Red Coulee." When the Blackfeet came from the north, the Snake Indians, who at that time inhabited the country, told the Blackfeet that there was a large medicine stone on the top of a hill, close to a ravine.

Several years after they were told this, a Blackfoot chief with fifty men went southward on the war-path. They all went to this stone, and the chief, being sceptical about the mysterious powers possessed by it, laughed at his men for exhibiting such childishness as to believe in it. In derision he hurled the stone down the mountain-side into the ravine and then departed. They engaged in a battle with some Indians in the south, and all of them were killed, only one man returning to tell the fate of his comrades. Ever since that time the Indians have called the place the "Red Coulee," and as they travel to and fro they never forget to go there and present their offerings, to insure safety in battle and protection by the way.

LEGEND OF THE RED STONE.

On the river flat at the mouth of one of the ravines at Lethbridge, and not many yards distant from the coal mine, lies a stone, which oftentimes I have seen painted and surrounded by numerous Indian trinkets which had been given to it by the Indians. The Blood Indians call it "Mikiotoûqse" (The Red Stone). Tradition states that

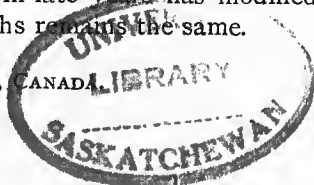
a long time ago a young man lay down beside this stone and fell asleep, and as he lay there he dreamed that the stone spoke to him and said, "Am I the Red Stone?" And the young man said, "Yes, you are the Red Stone." When he awoke he felt that this must be a mysterious stone that could thus converse with him, and he made offerings to it. Until the present day these offerings are made, the Indians believing that by giving to it reverence they will be blessed in all things that concern them in this life.

Among the Blackfeet there are several traditions which the writer was unable to obtain, as only a few of the older men possessed the knowledge sufficient to relate them accurately, and they seemed to be unwilling at the time to impart the information. The following were mentioned as myths of the people: the Myth of Asinakopi, or the Great Snake; the Great Bear Myth; the Lesser Bear; the Morning Star; the Man and Woman in the Moon.

There are also songs of historical importance, some relating to love, war, and one of traditional significance. The writer learned from Jerry Potts, a Piegan Indian, who is government interpreter, and from some of the Blood Indians, that there was a historical song which from the account given concerning it resembled the Song of Hiawatha. An aged chief named Manistokos, the Father of Many Children, was said to know it thoroughly, but never at any time was the author able to obtain possession of it. Joe Healey, a Blood Indian, who speaks English well, having lived when a boy with an Indian trader, who sent him to school, informed the writer that there were several secret societies among the Blackfoot tribes, the members of which had traditions of interest relating to their people. Only those who were initiated could obtain the revelation of these stories of mythological import. In relation to their social organization, the taboos of the gentes reveal facts of special significance to the mythology of the Blackfeet. The stories relating to the origin of the names of the gentes shed light upon the migrations and religious ideas of the people, but this phase of their traditions comes properly under the study of their social organization. Such names as Netsepoye, the people who speak the same language, the name of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Kaina, the name of the Blood Indians, the origin and significance of which is unknown, and Api-kûnĭ, the name of the Piegans, are of traditional importance. The separation of the tribes in late years has modified their mythology, but the basis of the myths remains the same.

PORT ARTHUR, ONTARIO, CANADA

John Maclean.



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